

**The situation in Georgia - The vital issue - Congress and the Republican party. From the Atlanta New Era. November 26th [1869?].**

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The Situation in Georgia—The Vital Issue—Congress and the Republican Party.

As stated in these columns a few days since, the ratification of the XVth Amendment is not among the conditions to reconstruction, so far as Georgia is concerned. That is to say, it is not among the conditions enumerated in the Acts of 1867-8; but, since it is held that Georgia has failed in her compliance with the conditions named—as well in her failure to enforce the XIVth Article as in the illegal expulsion of the colored members of the Legislature—the State is still practically unreconstructed.

Under this view of the case—and it is the view which Congress seems inclined to take—Georgia is actually as much out of the Union to-day as is Virginia and Mississippi. The action of the last named States will have to be ratified by Congress, before their reconstruction is complete. If, upon reviewing the matter, it should appear to Congress that some essential point of the law has been overlooked or evaded, then further legislation may be deemed necessary; and, in such an event, it is quite clear that, during the interval, the States named would not be entitled to their Constitutional rights as members of the Union. Reconstruction would be in abeyance; or at least contingent upon certain acts to be performed.

This is essentially the condition of Georgia to-day. Efforts have failed to satisfy Congress that the provisions of the XIVth Article were enforced by the primal legislature in July '68. It is claimed that there were a large number of members in both branches of the General Assembly who were obnoxious to this Amendment, but that they were permitted to retain their seats in open violation or evasion of the Reconstruction Acts. And it is maintained, in the second place, that the action of this body in expelling certain members on account of color merely, was such an evasion of the purpose and spirit of the law, as, practically, to nullify all claims of the State to recognition as a member of the Union by virtue of her compliance with the Reconstruction Acts. Hence, Georgia is still deprived of full membership in the Union. With her, reconstruction is still in abeyance; and it lies with Congress to say what shall be done.

It has been proposed, in order to propitiate Congress—by showing a willingness to comply with the law—that the colored members be restored to their seats in both Houses; that the body then purge itself of all ineligible members, as provided in the XIVth Article; and that, as an additional earnest of good faith, the XVth Amendment be ratified.

This would, of course, cover the whole ground in controversy. We have all along held that a strict enforcement of the XIVth Article, and a prompt compliance, in spirit, with the decision of the Supreme Court, on the negro eligibility question, would afford an antidote for all the ills to which our State is subjected; and as a Republican we should be pleased to see the XVth Amendment ratified, not as a condition to reconstruction merely, but because (from our standpoint,) it is right in itself.

There are grave doubts, however, in the minds of many able and well-informed Republicans in Georgia, whether, at this late day, such action on the part of our Legislature is possible, or at least expedient. Already have party feuds, and personal and political animosities been engendered by the bitter and protracted discussion of these issues.

The question of restoring the colored members has produced much acrimony and bad feeling among those who should be friends. Even some Republicans, it is intimated, will not vote for this measure—giving as a reason therefore that such action would so inflame the passions of their neighbors as to make their homes less preferable than exile itself. And, when it is borne in mind that the General Assembly, as at present constituted, has a working Democratic majority in both Houses; and that no Democrat, who is not prepared to sacrifice himself with his party, will vote to put negroes in office, it is hardly within the range of reasonable probability that such action will be had. And if had, it is suggested that its tendency would be, not to allay passion and lawlessness, but to perpetuate strife and contention in localities where peace and good feeling should prevail. Nor, would it accord, with our experience in human affairs, for the Legislature, as at present constituted, to concede the whole point in controversy, go back upon its entire record, resolve itself into a Provisional body as in July, 1868, and then purge itself of all members obnoxious to the XIVth Article. The good of the country might indeed demand such a sacrifice, but it is not in human nature to make it.

Under all these circumstances, the probabilities of adjustment, by the parties themselves, seems remote indeed; and, whilst the local politicians are thus higgling over a question which they cannot decide, the best interests of the State and the prosperity of the industrial masses are in suspense. Neither party will yield to the other. Discussion widens, rather than bridges over the breach; and the intervention of a third party seems necessary to a permanent settlement. *That third party is Congress* . We have consistently held that Congress is the ultimate tribunal in this matter; and have all along expressed a determination to abide the decision of that body, be that decision what it may. And we believe further, that this is the sentiment of nearly every Republican and Union man in Georgia. Nay, we believe it is the prevailing sentiment among many prominent moderate Democrats of the State; for it is a favorite dogma of the Democracy that, whilst they will not self-impose “negro equality” upon Georgia, they are nevertheless “prepared to submit to all such iniquities when imposed by the

Government." There is much food for reflection in this saying; and it is not improbable that Congress will take the hint.